1199SEIU seeks to impose sellout contract on 86,000 New York healthcare workers

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The leadership of 1199SEIU and the League of Voluntary Hospitals and Homes of New York are attempting to impose an agreement on 86,000 healthcare workers that cuts real wages and fails to protect jobs. The agreement resulted from "round-the-clock bargaining," according to the union, even though the current contract does not expire until September 30. This is a sign of the bureaucracy's determination to foreclose the possibility of a strike and to enforce management's demands. Workers must reject this tentative agreement and begin organizing independently of the union apparatus to fight for their needs.

The League is an association of 90 nonprofit hospitals, nursing homes, medical centers and other healthcare facilities in the New York metropolitan area. Its members include New York-Presbyterian, Montefiore Medical Center and Mount Sinai Hospital, which were affected by the nurses' strike earlier this year. During that struggle, the management of these hospitals joined forces and took a hard line against the nurses. Though the nurses won mass public support, the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) apparatus kept nurses divided. Instead of mobilizing its members in support of the nurses, the 1199SEIU leadership had them cross the picket line. NYSNA ultimately imposed contracts that did not meet the nurses' basic needs.

The 86,000 workers covered under the expiring contract with the League include certified nursing assistants, emergency medical technicians, housekeepers, social workers, dietary workers, clerical staff, technicians and lab workers. Their demands include wages that beat inflation, safe staffing and job security, including protections against AI.

A worker mentioned to the *World Socialist Web Site* that the tentative agreement provides a ratification bonus. "I want to know what we are giving up for this $1,000 bonus," she said.

The new tentative agreement provides 4 percent annual raises during its three-year term. These ostensible raises are cuts to real wages when inflation is considered. The Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers in New York rose 5.1 percent during the 12 months ending in May 2026. Moreover, the energy index advanced 26.9 percent during the same period, and the gasoline index increased by 46.8 percent. The "raises" that the 1199SEIU leadership has negotiated are completely inadequate for workers living in one of the world's most expensive cities.

The union is also touting a $2 million labor–management fund to provide legal support for workers who lose work authorization because of President Donald Trump's revocation of temporary protected status (TPS). But workers cannot rely on the courts to protect their ability to work or reside in the United States. Trump deported hundreds of immigrants to El Salvador in defiance of a federal court order that barred the deportations. Workers must defend their immigrant brothers and sisters not through the courts but through class struggle.

In addition, the tentative agreement provides inadequate job protection. It offers a no-layoff guarantee to workers with 10 or more years of seniority but no guarantee to workers with less experience. It also creates a labor–management committee "to address the impact of AI/digital technology on our jobs and protect clinical judgment." This language is deliberately vague. In practice, labor–management committees comprise hospital managers and union bureaucrats who collaborate to protect the hospitals' revenue at workers' expense.

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Moreover, the 1199SEIU members should take a warning from Montefiore's decision to lay off 12 utilization review nurses and replace them with AI. This action is being carried out under the new agreement that NYSNA falsely claimed provided safeguards against such layoffs. The agreement only requires management to notify NYSNA before implementing technology that affects nurses. If AI leads to layoffs, the agreement merely requires management to meet with NYSNA to discuss how to avoid such occurrences. Montefiore is not bound to accept any of NYSNA's proposals or to protect jobs. This is the type of agreement that the 1199SEIU leadership wishes to impose on workers.

For nurses, the tentative agreement with the League includes "staffing data commitments," according to a "highlights" sheet from the union. This abstract language should not be assumed to provide any guarantee of safe staffing, which is one of nurses' most urgent and consistent demands. The tentative agreement includes similarly nebulous language about "a jointly acknowledged path forward" to the extension of pension and health funds to workers who have so far been excluded from them.

A report on social media indicates that the tentative agreement includes a no-strike clause. If this is true, it constitutes a monstrous betrayal on the part of the 1199SEIU leadership. To give up the ability to strike is to surrender workers' most powerful weapon against exploitation and hazardous conditions. The inclusion of such a clause in the tentative agreement would be not only a capitulation to management but also sufficient grounds for the outright rejection of the agreement.

Workers at League hospitals should place no trust in the 1199SEIU apparatus, which consciously sacrifices its own members' interests to benefit the health systems. When New York City's home health aides, many of whom are 1199SEIU members, waged two hunger strikes to call for the City Council to abolish grueling 24-hour shifts, the union leadership did not mobilize its other members or participate in the home health aides' rallies or pressure the City Council to force a vote. In fact, the 1199SEIU leadership initially opposed the abolition of 24-hour shifts, only to change its position later.

In addition, 1199SEIU has had an intimate relationship with the Democratic Party for decades. It has overwhelmingly endorsed Democratic candidates and mobilized its members to support their campaigns. The union leadership endorsed Kathy Hochul for lieutenant governor in 2014 and Zohran Mamdani for mayor in 2025. During the nurses' strike earlier this year, Hochul and Mamdani worked together to bring in scab nurses from out of state. When Long Island Rail Road workers struck in May, Hochul denounced them as "reckless," and Mamdani advised New Yorkers to use scab buses. Hochul and Mamdani, like the Democratic Party as a whole, defend the interests of Wall Street while attacking workers.

Neither the 1199SEIU leadership nor the Democrats will support the healthcare workers at the League hospitals in their struggle. On the contrary, they will work to enforce the hospitals' terms. The 86,000 healthcare workers must reject the rotten tentative agreement and begin organizing independently of the union leadership and of both capitalist parties. They must form rank-and-file committees to develop a list of nonnegotiable demands and a strategy to win them. Moreover, they must appeal to other healthcare workers and workers in other sectors for support.

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